

National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Meeting
Reno, Nevada

November 8, 2004

Board Members Present: Robin Lohnes, Dr. Jay Merriam, Larry Johnson, Renee Taylor, Dr. Vernon Dooley, Hilleary Bogley and Gary Zakotnik. Board Members Absent: Bill Higham and Dr. Wayne Burkhardt. Washington Office and BLM Staff: Fran Cherry, Deputy Director, Tom Dyer, DAD, Renewable Resources and Planning, Jeff Rawson, Don Glenn, Sally Spencer, EK James, Dean Bolstad, Bea Wade, Lili Thomas, John Neill and Ramona DeLorme. Ann Aldrich, Associate State Director of Eastern States. Nevada State Office: Amy Leuders, Associate State Director, Suzie Stokke, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, Maxine Shane, Public Affairs. USDA, Forest Service Representative: Toni Strauss.

Deputy Director, Fran Cherry, was introduced by Tom Dyer, DAD, Renewable Resources and Planning. He conveyed that the Director sends her apology for not attending due to other commitments within the Bureau. Mr. Cherry had attended the Meadowood Adoption, in Virginia. He expressed that it was very interesting interacting with the people in attendance. He listened to their reasons why they attended and adopted wild horses. He emphasized the continuation of the marketing plan was critical and also, the continuation of the contraceptive program. He referred to the use of volunteers to support monitoring in the Oil and Gas Program in Wyoming and suggested such a use of volunteers in the wild horse and burro program in Nevada. He noted that the next 2 ½ years will be very important.

Amy Leuders, NV Associate State Director, welcomed the Board back to Reno. She appreciates all the work the Board does for the wild horse and burro program.

Suzie Stokke, NV Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, reviewed the Nevada program and brought the Board up-to-date. She noted that things were going well in Nevada. Out of the 102 Horse Management Areas (HMAs) there are 88 HMAs that now have established Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs). The State will furnish to the Board the total number of horses in each of the established AMLs.

August 2004 Minutes

August 9-10, 2004 minutes were approved as is.

2005 Nominations Update

Jeff Rawson reported on the Advisory Board nominations. The three terms due to expire in February 2005 are the representatives from the Public (Bill Higham); Veterinary Medicine (Dr. Jay Merriam) and Wild Horse Advocacy (Robin Lohnes). The nominations are being reviewed and the Charter has been modified so that if the nominations are not completed by the next meeting date, the existing Board members will continue on with the approval from the Secretary. It was noted that the three terms held by Larry Johnson (Wildlife), Gary Zakotnik (Livestock) and Hilleary Bogley (Humane Advocacy) will expire June 2006.

FY05 Funding Update

Don Glenn and Jeff Rawson updated the Board on the 2005 funding. The 2005 Appropriations Bill has not been approved and BLM is operating under continuing resolutions. Both the House and Senate identify an additional 10 ½ million dollars to be made to the Wild Horse and Burro Program in FY 2005. BLM is working with each of the states on how the money will be distributed. BLM anticipates the budget to be approved sometime in January. Jeff Rawson will provide the House and Senate language to the Board members. There will be a stronger effort to increase the number of adoptions and to look at the habitat and population management on-the-ground.

Update Pending Litigation

There is no new litigation with the Wild Horse and Burro Program.

Eastern States Presentation

Ann Aldrich, Associate State Director of Eastern States (ES), gave an overview of their program. She said that Eastern States recently held an adoption in Meadowood, Virginia. She added Eastern States is a key to reaching AML in that the number of animals removed to attain AML is dependent, in part, on the number of successful adoptions. ES has adopted 68,431 horses and burros since the adoption program began. 40% of the animals are adopted in the East. ES has requested a Management Control Review Study and Ann gave an overview of efforts to implement the recommendations. The cost of adoptions in ES is \$871 per horse, which is now the second lowest State Unit Cost in BLM, for adoptions, in FY04. In their marketing efforts, ES have increased their advertisement for the Spanish speaking community by including both English and Spanish newspaper ads. She discussed the Eastern States Evaluation and will be implementing the recommendations to improve the program. She noted that Eastern States will work more closely with the Wild Horse and Burro Foundation, Washington NPO, and the National Wild Horse and Burro Program Adoption Program to improve their marketing efforts.

Program Updates

Lili Thomas reported on the FY04 and FY05 gather schedules. She noted that two additional columns had been inserted (indication 'AML low/high' and 'Animals on Range') in the gather schedule.

Bea Wade reported on the pipeline report. She said there had been a \$200 reduction in the adoption cost of each animal. She reported that there are 23,000 horses in the short- and long-term holding. The discussion included managing the flow of the horses through the entire process to maintain the health of the horses to reduce cost and maximize the adoption. During this discussion, Board expressed its appreciation to BLM and Eastern States for reducing costs in the program and increasing adoptions. Larry Johnson added that the folks involved in adoptions deserve thanks and a pat on the back, as it is extremely gratifying to see an increase in adoptions. The more animals BLM adopts, the better the program is.

Facilities Report

Bea Wade gave a facility report to the Board. During the presentation, there was discussion about how many horses can be held in each of the short-term and long-term holding facilities and how the BLM is keeping account of both the adoptable and unadoptable horses in the facilities.

National Adoption Plan

Sally Spencer gave the Board an update on the National Adoption Plan. Within the adoption plan, BLM is looking at streamlining adoptions, using best practices, being cost-effective, and establishing advertising, photo, exhibit and volunteer guidelines. BLM will be looking at 1) adoption location; 2) adoption promotion; and 3) staff skill mix. BLM will be issuing an instruction memorandum issuing guidelines. The question whether or not the states can buy advertising arose. It was noted that in some states approval from the State Director is needed in order to buy advertising for adoptions. Sally informed the group that the Washington Office will help some states in their advertising, if the State Director does not allow it.

Carol Alm, Executive Director, Wild Horse and Burro Foundation discussed the marketing program meeting which was held in Denver, CO with industry leaders and Washington personnel. It had generated good ideas and produced assistance in the program. Survey showed the key is to tie the wild horses and burros in heritage and land conservation.

California Volunteer Pilot Project

Sally Spencer discussed the California Volunteer Pilot Project, an initiative to involve more hands-on volunteers, and noted that there will be an update on the pilot at the March meeting.

Forest Service Update

Toni Strauss, USDA, Forest Service Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, provided an update of Forest Service efforts to manage their program. Funds are available for transfer to BLM for their assistance within their horse program for FY'05. The Forest Service is working on a Memorandum of Understanding with the Bureau of Land Management to provide a framework for reimbursement of services provided by BLM.

Fertility Control

Dean Bolstad noted that there are three fertility studies in place (McCullough Peaks, Little Book Cliffs and Pryor Mountain), and reported on planned population based studies in FY'05. It will be 3-4 years before BLM will have enough data to know the full benefit and effect of fertility control.

August Recommendations/Response

Jeff Rawson reviewed the August 2004 recommendations:

1. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends that the BLM look into the possibility of using lands for long-term holding of unadoptable geldings, including utilizing vacant allotments, exploring legal issues, costs and availability.

BLM agrees with the concept of looking for additional ways to further streamline and enhance BLM's ability to deal with unadoptable excess wild horses. While current practices today represent a cost savings on a per animal basis as compared to past efforts, the total costs for long-term holding of unadoptable excess wild horses represent a significant portion of the Wild Horse and Burro Program's budget.

The following information is not seen as a final response to the above recommendation but is more in line with the thought of "looking into the possibility". The BLM offers the following information along those lines and looks forward to continued discussion with the Advisory Board on these issues.

Vacant Grazing Allotments

Occasionally a public land grazing allotment may for various reasons become vacant or no longer have an active grazing permit attached to it. This is a relatively infrequent occurrence. While these areas may not have active grazing use associated with them they are identified in land use plans as having forage available for livestock grazing. The following are issues associated with the consideration of using this forage for excess wild horses:

- Would require review and potentially amendment of land use plans for consideration of use by wild horses
- As these areas may be outside of an established herd area, legislation may be required before wild horses could be planned there
- These areas are typically used to help resolve local resource conflicts such as fire rehabilitation efforts, riparian restoration, etc. Utilizing these areas for excess wild horses may result in the loss of potential forage reserves to accommodate these types of needs.
- Placing horses in a vacant allotment will likely rekindle the issues for which the allotment became vacant in the first place, such as water availability, intermingled private land, or conflicts with other uses.

The BLM is currently considering new policy on how to deal with vacant grazing allotments. While the consideration of these types of areas for excess wild horses can continue, the BLM does not see any immediate opportunity for the reduction in long-term holding costs for wild horses.

Alternative Consideration

The BLM offers an alternative for discussion with the Advisory Board that may help address the issue of minimizing long-term holding costs for unadoptable excess wild horses. The proposal would involve maintaining the low-point AML number as a “core breeding population” with the difference between the low and mid-point AML number managed as a non-reproductive population, where feasible.

Under this option, HMA(s) would be gathered and animals would be released back to the range up to the low-point AML following the gather (mares may be treated with PZP). This portion of the herd would comprise the breeding population. An additional number of non-reproducing animals (up to about the mid-point AML) would also be released; these animals would comprise the non-reproductive population of the herd. The “core breeding herd” or low-point AML number would continue to be managed as a viable breeding population. As herd numbers grow near the high-point AML, a gather would be scheduled.

An additional option to consider would be to reduce the breeding population to the minimally viable population size and to manage for a non-reproductive population between that level and the mid-point AML.

Managing a “core breeding population” together with a non-reproductive population of animals on the range has potential to meet at least some of the demand for LTH, particularly within HMAs with total populations of at least 200 animals or greater. By meeting at least some of the LTH demand on the range, LTH costs could be reduced. There may also be some savings in short-term holding (STH) costs as animals targeted for the non-reproductive portion of the herd could be sterilized at the temporary holding facility, avoiding the need to ship, vaccinate, freeze mark, and return the animals from BLM corrals to the HMA.

Census Research

Dean Bolstad reported on the status of the census research project. There was a discussion about an offer made by the Air Force to utilize infra-red for censusing and Jeff Rawson and Fran Cherry agreed to follow up on the status.

APHIS Agreement

Don Glenn updated the Board on the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Agreement which would include more detailed cost accounting. He noted that it is expected to be signed within a month.

BLM/Forest Service Agreement

Don Glenn updated the Board on the coordination efforts with the Forest Service in the Wild Horse and Burro program. BLM receives compensation from the Forest Service for costs associated with this program.

Pilot Project for Reduced Adoption Fee

Dean Bolstad reported that discussions continue concerning the pilot for reduced fees and a status report will be given at the next meeting.

Alternatives to Long-Term Holding

Discussion revolved around two issues: 1) the use of vacant allotments and 2) maintaining the low-point AML number as a “core breeding population” with the difference between the low and mid-point AML number managed as a non-reproductive population, where feasible.

Regarding the use of vacant allotments, the Board identified several concerns such as much of the forage across the west has already been allocated, and the utilization of vacant allotments may require reopening land use plans to amendment. Another issue is the impact on state and private lands that lay on BLM allotments. Additionally, there could be problems with fencing and impact on wildlife. The utilization of vacant allotments may be more useful to maintain AML than to reach AML.

The alternative suggested by BLM to maintain a “core breeding population” generated much discussion including: 1) treatment and handling of animals at the capture site; 2) impact on the herd behavior, social structure and population; 3) impact on ability reach AML by 2007; 4) impact on selective removal policy; and 5) short- and long-term costs and benefits.

Follow Up Items

1. The Bureau agreed to follow up with the solicitors on the legal ramification of the use of vacant lots. Jeff agreed to brief Wayne Burkhardt on the Board discussion on this issue.
2. The Bureau agreed to provide an update on the Wyoming Pilot Project at the next meeting.
3. Furnish Board members with FY’05 House and Senate budget language.
4. Status update for the California Volunteer pilot project.
5. Check with the Air Force pertaining to feasibility of utilizing infra-red censusing.

Public Comment

Public comments began at 4:00 p.m.

Next Meeting/Date/Site

The Board discussed reducing the meetings to two meetings a year (early spring/late winter). It was discussed that a meeting be held in February or March, along with a gather or an adoption event for the Board members to attend.

<u>Month</u>	<u>Place</u>	
March 7 or March 14	Sacramento, CA Boise, ID	Volunteer Pilot Program
November 7, 2005	Eastern States Jackson, WY Washington Reno, NV	w/gather

Meeting formally adjourned at 5:00 p.m., Monday, November 8, 2004.